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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1251st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 5 March 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. ABOUL-NASR

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 7) (continued)

Ninth periodic report of Israel (CERD/C/294/Add.1; CERD/C/52/Misc.8/Rev.1) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Israeli delegation took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. NOBEL said he would appreciate clarification of the situation of Israeli citizens of Ethiopian origin and mentioned the case of the Falachas, who complained that the blood they donated had been rejected on the grounds that it was contaminated by the AIDS virus. Furthermore, it appeared that 10 per cent of suicides among young Israeli soldiers were recruits of Ethiopian origin who accounted for only 1 per cent of the army's strength. Surely that suggested that the persons in question were subjected to pressure. Had steps been taken to remedy the situation?

3. The term "demographic balance" was often used to express the objective of reducing the Arab population in certain areas. Was that an official policy? In any event that embarrassing expression, without suggesting the idea of ethnic cleansing, implied ethnic reduction.

4. In May 1997, certain shops in Jerusalem had sold black T-shirts bearing the names of the towns of Hebron, Nazareth, Ramallah and Jerusalem and the words "Wherever you mess with us, you will be chopped liver". It was easy to imagine the sort of atmosphere in which young Palestinians lived and how easy it was to recruit terrorists among a population - half of which was under 15 years of age - that was grappling with a difficult economic situation, a shortage of housing, provocation and constant humiliation. In that connection he referred to the case of a young girl who had been forced to strip completely in the course of a frontier check. The Government should do everything possible to ensure peace, justice and equality for all. Was that too much to expect?

5. Mr. GARVALOV welcomed the presence of Mr. Lamdan, Ambassador of Israel, on the delegation. The report of Israel was interesting, and although it was impossible to agree with some of the points it made others could be accepted. In any event, he was of the view that Mr. Banton had presented an excellent analysis of the situation in Israel and considered that if the State party paid more attention to the question of equality for all Israeli citizens many of the difficulties being encountered would be overcome.

6. Contrary to what Mr. Sabel had stated at the previous meeting, he took the view that Israel was not being treated harshly by the Committee but in the same way as all other Member States. He recalled that, in August 1997, the Committee had decided it would no longer consider the situation in Israel in terms of the prevention of racial discrimination, early warning measures and urgent action procedures. That was why the periodic report of Israel

(CERD/C/52/Misc.8/Rev.1) was now being considered on the basis of the normal procedure, namely, under article 9 of the Convention. The Committee rarely took a decision of that nature.

7. He recalled, as Mr. Sabel had done at the previous meeting, an incident that had occurred before the beginning of the Second World War, namely, of a vessel carrying European Jews - Germans for the most part - who had decided to leave their country. All the ports at which the vessel called in Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela, Cuba and the United States - and in the latter case to President Roosevelt's great embarrassment - had refused to allow its passengers ashore.

8. Reverting to the report, he said it was his impression that the State party had not acted as energetically as it should have done to curb racial discrimination under articles 2, 1 (c) and (d), 4 and 7 of the Convention.

9. It was stated in paragraphs 18 and 19 of the report that the Supreme Court had frequently ruled on the impermissibility of racial discrimination. Yet that was not enough to ensure the full implementation of the articles to which he had referred. Paragraph 28 stated that the initial emphasis in Israel was placed on preventing discrimination by governmental or public bodies of any kind and that such discrimination was at present illegal. He wondered whether that statement was optimistic rather than a reflection of reality. Moreover, in paragraph 50 it was stated that there was an undeniable gap between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority as regards the standard of living and involvement in national affairs. The reasons given in that paragraph were plausible, but it could well be asked whether the situation could not be improved by the political will to promote understanding, tolerance and equality.

10. He would like to know what was meant by the statement made in paragraph 55, that universities, post-secondary level colleges and specialized technical schools were fully integrated. Were they really integrated, in the positive sense of the term, or was the situation one which was likely to lead to assimilation? Was Arabic used in higher educational establishments?

11. He would appreciate additional information on how article 7 was being implemented in Israel. Did school programmes include instruction in racism and racial discrimination? Was the Convention studied in secondary schools and higher educational establishments? In that connection he quoted paragraph 57 of a report by the ADALAH organization (Legal Centre for the Rights of Arab Minorities in Israel) concerning violations of the Convention, according to which the Ministry of Education had failed to take steps to inculcate in students the value of measures to curb racism. He hoped the delegation would comment on that statement. Lastly, article 5 (d) (ii) proclaimed the right to leave any country, including one's own, and to return to one's country. What was the situation of Arabs who had previously lived in Israel and were no longer able to return to their country?

12. Mr. YUTZIS said that he found the Committee's dialogue with the delegation satisfactory. In connection with the implementation of article 5 of the Convention, he referred to paragraph 50 of the report according to which there was an undeniable gap between the Jewish majority and the Arab

minority as regards living standards and involvement in national affairs. That situation was justified by arguments of a strategic or political nature, namely, the internal security situation, and by the fact that Arabs did not perform military service. Yet the State could influence the internal situation and modify conscription conditions. However, the possibility of finding themselves face to face with their fellows was hardly likely to induce Arabs to join the army as volunteers.

13. The explanation that a large proportion of Israeli Arabs lived in villages where they engaged in traditional forms of agriculture which had an impact on their levels of living and participation in national affairs gave the impression that it was for the Arabs to improve their lot, whereas it was the State's duty to improve the quality of life of its citizens. He hoped that the next report would describe the measures that would be taken to narrow the gap between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority.

14. With reference to the implementation of articles 6 and 7, he asked how far laws and regulations concerning public life were published in Arabic. What proportion of private television stations broadcast in Arabic? Similarly, how many FM radio stations broadcast in Arabic?

15. There was no hiding the existence of a number of religious and political fundamentalisms and in particular of Jewish fundamentalism. In his view, fundamentalism was the result of a psychological attitude and not the interpretation of political or religious texts. He drew attention to the tribute paid by the State of Israel to fundamentalism with the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. How did authorities responsible for controlling fundamentalist movements function? Lastly, he recalled that the Committee had, in considering the implementation of the Convention in all States, invariably proved itself to be extremely vigilant about anti-Semitism, and had formulated a general declaration on the terrorist attacks that had occurred in the United Kingdom and Argentina. That demonstrated the Committee's even-handedness in the fulfilment of its mandate.

16. The CHAIRMAN speaking as a member of the Committee, emphasized that great care should be taken in using the term fundamentalism. Persons who committed crimes or participated in massacres could not be described as fundamentalists; it was terrorists and criminals who should be regarded as such.

17. Mr. DIACONU said that Israel's efforts to curb discrimination were to be commended and encouraged.

18. However, it was unfortunate that the statistics presented at the beginning of the State party's report made a distinction only between the total population and the Arab population. That simplistic presentation was a very poor reflection of reality, especially as in the following paragraphs specific reference was made to Ethiopians, Druze, etc.

19. He found it particularly gratifying, as a Romanian, that Israel had announced the adoption of a new labour law that protected the rights of

foreign workers. According to certain reports, Romanian workers in Israel had been victims of abuses - in some cases involving brutality - committed by Israeli or foreign employers.

20. He agreed with Mr. Garvalov that Israel's laws on racial discrimination, with the possible exception of the Penal Code, were not very explicit. Moreover, it was significant that the report mentioned only case law but no specific laws. Nor did it contain any declaration by the Government concerning the elimination of racial discrimination. The only declaration referred to was the one establishing the State of Israel, which was quoted in paragraph 3. Israel must remedy that situation without fail. Peace would eventually have to be made with the Arabs and the State party should make the necessary preparations, both in terms of legislation as well as education. Contrary to what was stated in paragraph 30 of the report, norms prohibiting racial discrimination should apply not only to the public sector but also the private sector.

21. With respect to education, it would be useful to know whether Israel had sufficient public schools offering education in Arabic and whether Arab culture was safeguarded in school programmes. He noted that there was no higher education in Arabic; that was extremely unfortunate in the medical sphere, for example, where it gave rise to problems of communication between practitioners and patients. Lastly, he was of the view that a sustained educational effort should be directed at judges, police officers and the population at large.

22. Mrs. SADIQ ALI said that, as most of the questions she had intended to put to the Israeli delegation had already been asked by previous speakers, she would simply request clarification of a few specific points.

23. According to information published in Dubai in August 1997 by an Indian press agency, the Israeli Prime Minister had been accused by the Palestinian Authority of authorizing Israeli pharmaceutical companies to test dangerous drugs on Palestinian and Arab prisoners. Could the representative of Israel provide any explanations of that allegation?

24. Another point on which she would appreciate additional information was the status of Israelis of Bene origin, who had come from India. It appeared that orthodox rabbis did not regard them as fully-fledged Jews and for that reason refused to consecrate their religious marriages. What was the actual situation?

25. As regards health matters, she had been informed that a Palestinian woman living in Ramallah had been unable to have her father, who was suffering from a heart condition, cared for in East Jerusalem and had been obliged to take him as far as Jordan. Had that been the case and what was the Government's policy regarding access to Israeli hospitals?

26. Reverting to a more general context, she recalled that the sealing-off of Palestinian territories constituted a violation of articles 3 and 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and that

a recent United Nations report confirmed that such measures had a disastrous impact on the levels of living of the Palestinian population and on employment.

27. B'Tselem, the Israeli Centre for human rights information in the occupied territories, itself recognized that the Israeli authorities pursued a discriminatory policy with respect to Palestinians, such discrimination being of a systematic nature in the case of housing and the occupation of land. Could the representative of Israel explain why the Israeli Government's decision of 1996 officially recognizing seven Arab villages in the Megev had never been applied? In the case of unrecognized Arab villages, was there no solution other than that of evicting the inhabitants from their homes by force?

28. Some of the information contained in Israel's report also deserved comment. How did the State party explain differences in the infantile mortality rate of the Arab population and the Israeli population, as well as differences in school attendance rates and housing conditions?

29. Paragraph 50 of Israel's report explained that the difference between the standard of living of the Jewish majority and that of the Arab minority was due in part to the fact that very few Arabs joined the army and therefore forewent many of the advantages connected with the performance of military service. Were not such advantages a form of discrimination?

30. She would also like to know what was the connection between a person's profession and place of residence and his possibility of enjoying his fundamental rights to the full.

31. Mr. SHAHI said that as the questions put to Israel by the Country Rapporteur, Mr. Banton, were both very comprehensive and pertinent, he would simply highlight some of them.

32. The method of issuing building permits in Jerusalem, which was the subject of Mr. Banton's question 3, was in his view a flagrant example of discrimination.

33. Moreover, referring to Mr. Banton's question 4, he asked whether the 1985 amendment of the Basic Law barring from electoral lists parties which did not expressly recognize "the State of Israel as the State of the Jewish people" was not tantamount to excluding from politics all parties that argued in favour of equality between Jewish and Arab citizens.

34. Why, Mr. Banton had asked in his question 6, was the representative of the State of Israel not "certain" that the question of the right of return of Palestinians previously driven from their homes was covered by the Convention?

35. He too would like to know whether the Equal Opportunities in Employment Act was at present effectively enforced and would appreciate additional information on the remedies available to persons whose economic and social rights had been violated as well as on the compensation they received in accordance with article 6 of the Convention.

36. On the question of the occupied territories, the Committee rejected Israel's argument that it did not have to discuss the economic and social situation prevailing in those territories in its report since it was not responsible for it. So long as Israel maintained its presence in the territories, the "lack of jurisdiction" argument was inadmissible. He recalled in that connection that the settlements were not only illegal but constituted an obstacle to the peace process. Those facts were indisputable.

37. In the matter of housing, it was quite obvious that new construction in the occupied territories should be accessible to all without distinction as to ethnic origin and that the system of issuing residence permits to the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem constituted a form of discrimination against the Arab population. He would like to know whether the practice of razing Palestinian houses on the pretext that their owners had not obtained building permits was continuing in Jerusalem or elsewhere.

38. Furthermore, as Mr. Banton had asked in his question 17, why were Palestinians denied access to certain highways when their land had been confiscated so that they could be constructed? How were they prevented from using such highways? Lastly, the activities of certain religious groups whose doctrine was based on ethnic origin were contrary to the Convention and obstructed the peace process. How did Israel explain that such activities were tolerated?

39. Mr. SHERIFIS said that in paragraph 7 of its report the State party took pride in being an open and multicultural society. Had it therefore taken steps to have the objectives of the Convention widely publicized in Israel and made known to the population at large? Moreover, did Israel intend to make a declaration under article 14 and participate in the expenses of the Committee, as provided for by the amendment to article 8, paragraph 6? He explained that he put that question to all delegations as a matter of course, but requested the Israeli delegation to take note of it, had it not already done so.

40. One question that was particularly important to him concerned the rights of displaced persons and refugees in occupied territories - regardless by whom they were occupied. Everyone no doubt remembered the Exodus episode, which had illustrated the Cypriot tradition of hospitality and humanity.

41. In that connection, perhaps the Israeli representative could explain why his country, which said it respected international humanitarian law, claimed the right to apply the fourth Geneva Convention de facto and not de jure.

42. He wished to revert to the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in the Louzides v. Turkey case, referred to at the previous meeting by Mr. van Boven. There was an obvious parallel between that case, which concerned a Greek Cypriot who claimed the right to return to his house in northern Cyprus from which he had been evicted by the Turkish occupying forces, and the situation of the Palestinians. It was particularly interesting to note that the European Court of Human Rights in its judgement had rejected the Turkish Government's argument that it was not responsible for the violations committed since it exercised neither effective control nor jurisdiction over the northern part of Cyprus where the property of the plaintiff was situated. According to the Court, its argument was refuted by

the active presence of a large number of Turkish troops in the region. That indirectly answered Mr. Banton's question 14, namely, "If the Israeli Government is unwilling in its periodic reports to cover implementation of the Convention in the occupied territories, does that not make it appropriate for the Committee to consider such questions under its procedure for the prevention of racial discrimination?" In his view the reply was yes. Moreover, the reply would have been the same in respect of any other State party in a similar situation and should not be interpreted as a hostile stand against Israel, with which he wished to establish a useful dialogue.

43. Mr. SABEL (Israel) said he would endeavour to reply to the various groups of questions put by members of the Committee, most of which had dealt with Israel's Arab and Ethiopian minorities and the question of refugees and displaced persons. The question of refugees was the subject of political negotiations between Israel and three adjacent countries. It was an extremely complex problem involving large numbers of both Arabs and Jews to which the Israeli authorities were giving a great deal of attention. In that connection he said it was unfortunate that, at the previous meeting, Israel had been the target of an out and out political diatribe which was quite uncalled for in the Committee.

44. Since the Arab minority was exempted from compulsory military service, the Israeli authorities intended to introduce compulsory national civil service for that minority which they could perform in the hospitals, for example.

45. On the question of building permits, he said that the Municipality of Jerusalem had granted 2,991 of the 3,487 applications examined in 1996 and 1997. It had approved 75 per cent of applications for projects in Arab neighbourhoods and 90.3 per cent of applications in Jewish neighbourhoods. In 1997 it had issued 29 orders for the removal of illegal construction; of that number only one had been carried out in Arab neighbourhoods and six in Jewish neighbourhoods. He added that the authorities compensated the owners of houses that were demolished in the public interest, but only if their construction had been authorized.

46. It was very difficult to control racist propaganda on the Internet owing to the existence of a legal vacuum that was explained by the nature of that medium. However, the offence should be covered by the provisions of the Penal Code that made incitement to racial hatred punishable.

47. As regards body searches of Arab women, he explained that, under the regulations, women could be searched only by other women, and only if it was absolutely necessary to do so. The participation of men would constitute an extremely serious offence and they would certainly be prosecuted by the military authorities.

48. Torture was illegal. Israel was a party to the Convention against Torture, respected the obligations it had assumed and would submit its periodic report to the Committee Against Torture on 16 May 1998.

49. With respect to the behaviour of members of the armed forces professing extremist religious beliefs, he explained that the army was subject to

military regulations that alone should dictate their conduct, to the exclusion of any personal beliefs. The army also provided training in humanitarian law with the assistance of experts from the International Committee of the Red Cross. Moreover, the principles of non-discrimination as well as human rights were taught in the public schools as well as in the police and the army, where they constituted a compulsory subject.

50. In reply to a question concerning a party that advocated that Israel should be the land of all its citizens, he referred to case law on the subject, explaining that in the past a court had decided, by virtue of Basic Law: Knesset, that a party which, in its platform, propounded the idea that Israel should not be the land of all Jews but that of all its citizens, could indeed participate in the elections.

51. Referring to the question of violence against Arab women, he said that unlike marriage and divorce, which were governed by religious law, cases involving domestic violence were handled by the civil courts in accordance with the Penal Code. In 1996, 13,600 complaints of spousal abuse had been brought by Jewish women and 1,367 by Arab women. Moreover, 1,972 complaints of sexual offences had been brought by Jewish women and 117 by Arab women. The police were resolutely combatting "honour killings", which were current among the Arab population, by recruiting specialized personnel and organizing suitable courses and training sessions. The Supreme Court had repeatedly condemned that practice, reaffirming that its perpetrators should be severely punished. The funds made available to curb violence against women, regardless whether they were Jewish or Arab, had more than tripled and the budget for help centres meeting the needs of both Arab and Jewish women had septupled. Of the 12 shelters for battered women, one took in only Arab women and the 11 others accepted both Arab and Jewish women. There were two "halfway houses" for Arab women and girls, and 20 of the 100 social workers were Arab. Moreover, 2 of the 11 hotlines in Israel were for the exclusive use of Arab communities.

52. He explained that the fact that so few decisions had been taken by the High Court of Justice on complaints of discrimination by the administration was explained by the device used by the Government in disputes pitting it against individuals. On the advice of the Attorney-General, the Government immediately opted for an amicable arrangement if the outcome of possible legal proceedings appeared to be uncertain. He also explained that the reason why the report mentioned only the decisions of the High Court of Justice and completely disregarded these of the ordinary courts was that the High Court supervised all judicial authorities and institutions, including the Attorney-General, the police, the security services and the army.

53. He recognized that, in practice, military service might well create a gulf between Arabs and Jews without there being any deliberate desire to create discrimination. Insofar as the army provided its recruits with advanced scientific and technical training and thereby knowledge that was subsequently useful in their careers, the Arabs, not being required to perform military service, were at a disadvantage as compared with the Jews. However, it was forbidden by law to invoke military service as a reason for intentional

discrimination in employment matters. In that connection, employers could not demand qualifications, particularly of a military nature, that were excessive or unrelated to the job in question.

54. As for discrimination against Arabs who wished to become members of the Kalsir community, he explained that the question was rather complex since the community was a cooperative whose members chose the newcomers they desired. The High Court of Justice was examining the question and could urge the parties to adopt a compromise solution.

55. He also explained that the State Comptroller was appointed by and reported to the Knesset, and that dual nationality was authorized by the law, all immigrants being allowed to retain their nationality of origin.

56. With respect to license plates, he said that certain imported cars could use their foreign plates for short periods on the understanding that they had to be equipped with Israeli plates if they remained on Israeli territory beyond a certain time limit.

57. As regards what was written on the tombstone of Mr. Batuch Goldstein, a racist murderer, he explained that Israeli citizens could inscribe whatever they wished on the gravestones of their deceased; the State could take any action in such matters only in the case of shrines or public monuments.

58. He confirmed that Israel indeed had a law of return which did not, however, in any way affect the nationality of Arabs living in Israel any more than it prevented a person from acquiring Israeli citizenship by naturalization. He added that there was no road or section of road in Israel which was closed to any segment of the population and that 3,000 persons were being held in detention for security reasons; 382 of that number were under administrative detention.

59. Referring to the Supreme Court's ruling mentioned in paragraph 27 of the periodic report, he explained that the judge had in fact decided that the right of a person to express his opinion in his own language prevailed over the desire to promote Hebrew. He also explained that the members of Israel's Ethiopian community, whose sociocultural background was very different from that of Israeli society, had experienced a cultural shock which had made it necessary to adopt stopgap measures. It had been in accordance with its general rules that prohibited blood donations by persons belonging to groups at risk that Israel's blood bank had initially decided not to accept the blood donations of Ethiopians, since they had come from a malaria-infected zone. As a compromise measure it had agreed to accept their blood but had decided not to use it, which of course had offended the Ethiopian community. The authorities had not yet found a satisfactory solution to that dilemma.

60. As stated in paragraph 55 of the report, Arabic was the language of instruction in Arab schools whereas in universities it was Hebrew, which was by far the majority language except in certain disciplines such as Arabic literature.

61. The applicability of all the provisions of international humanitarian law in the occupied territories was a legal point that had not been settled in a final and satisfactory manner, mainly because of the existence of the Palestine Authority.

62. The Kahana organizations had been dissolved and could not reconstitute themselves under another name. Unfortunately, it was extremely difficult in practice to apply the law on the subject. In any event, persons inciting racism were brought to book by the authorities.

63. The Equal Opportunities in Employment Act did not apply to persons employing less than six workers so as to enable individuals and families to employ members of their household. An operation employing more than six persons, however, was regarded as an enterprise under the law, in which case the provisions prohibiting discrimination in employment were applicable. Disputes concerning employment were heard by the labour courts.

64. In accordance with its general policy, the Israeli Government did not build low-cost housing although it provided mortgage loans to its citizens, both Jews and Arabs, without any distinction.

65. The increase in the Arab population, which had grown from 300,000 to 1.2 million, proved that the Israeli authorities were not trying to reduce its size. Moreover, the Government was endeavouring to promote equality between communities.

66. The text of the Convention and the Committee's conclusions were published in the Official Gazette in Arabic and Hebrew, and were accessible to all.

67. All drugs were labelled in Hebrew, English and Arabic.

68. In conclusion, he emphasized that Israel was an open society in which information circulated freely, thereby actively promoting democracy.

69. Mr. ZAKEN (Israel), elaborating on some of the shorter replies given by Mr. Sabel, said that the episode of the blood donated by Israelis of Ethiopian origin had created such a scandal that the public had even called for the resignation of the head of service responsible. He added that one unexpected consequence of that incident had been the election of an Israeli of Ethiopian origin as a Labour Party deputy. He noted that another population group, namely, the inhabitants of "unrecognized villages" had caught the attention of the Committee. He took exception to the use of that expression since the people in question were dispersed groups of nomads and Bedouin who were settling down. The figure of 10,000 nomads in the northern part of the country given the previous day was excessive, for in point of fact there were 400 families totalling 3,000 persons in all. During the previous 25 years, 60,000 inhabitants had gradually settled in 7 Bedouin villages having the necessary infrastructure, and he added that it was difficult to provide infrastructure for nomadic populations. He categorically refuted the fanciful statement made the previous day that the Bedouin were being forced to settle down; not a single one had been forced to do so. At the present time four new communities were being created for the Bedouin of the south.

70. Israel was not being outdone in efforts to curb domestic violence and violence against women. Only the previous day a Conference organized by his office had been held in Haifa in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister. It had been attended by 400 Arab women active in politics, research and social work and by an eminent expert in Islamic law, who had explained why violence was unacceptable under that law. The purpose of the Conference, which had been sponsored by the Government, had been to improve the condition of Arab women in Israeli society and to launch a campaign - complete with stickers and a hotline - with that in view.

71. A large number of questions had dealt with the subject of access by Israelis of Arab origin to education. He corrected the false idea that a person had to do his military service before he could obtain a scholarship from the Ministry of Education. Not only was military service not a sina qua non, but scholarships were granted on the basis of other criteria such as the candidate's resources or level of education. A Jewish student who had done his military service did not automatically obtain a scholarship, whereas many Arab students had been granted one by the Ministry or a university. He himself was chairman of a scholarship committee which each year granted about 100 scholarships only to Arab students.

72. Moreover, any Bedouin who in future applied for a higher education scholarship would certainly get one. He was also in a position to reassure the Committee about the proportion of the education budget allocated to each community; the Arab population was even at an advantage at the secondary level, where Arab students accounted for only 20 per cent of the student body but received more than 30 per cent of the budget. As for the status of Arabic in Israel, he explained that, although university instruction - apart from literature courses - was not in Arabic, the level of Arab history, culture and civilization courses was extremely high in the five major Israeli universities and therefore attracted Jewish and foreign students. The human rights discipline was extremely well developed at the university level. As a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he personally had a large number of Arab students who took an interest in the human rights situation in various countries, including Egypt, although oddly enough none of them had elected to concentrate on the situation in Israel.

73. One of the Committee's concerns was the number of Arab citizens in the public service and, referring to figures, he demonstrated that their presence was far from negligible. About 20,000 persons of Arab origin were employed in various ministries, 15,000 of them by the Ministry of Education, in which they accounted for roughly the same proportion of their community as Jewish teachers. In addition, hundreds if not thousands of Arab citizens were employed by NGOs who were subsidized by public funds. Moreover, in order to increase the number of Arab citizens employed by the central administration, a quota had been established for its recruitment of Arab graduates. As for the obstacle to integration represented by official holidays, he explained that civil servants were entitled not only to official Israeli holidays but also to those of the Muslim, Christian or Druse communities.

74. The Committee also wished to know to what extent Arab citizens participated in the media and benefited from them. Although the number of Arabs employed by television and radio stations broadcasting in Hebrew was

rather low - although a few occupied high posts - they constituted the majority of the staff of radio and television stations broadcasting in Arabic. In that connection he corrected another false idea presented the previous day that interviews of Arab personalities dealt only with Arab affairs. In point of fact, Israelis of Arab origin participated in discussions in Hebrew as well as in Arabic on a wide variety of subjects. Furthermore, thanks to cable and satellite television, the Arab population could watch the televised programmes of any Arab country.

75. Some members of the Committee had expressed concern about the security of Arabs and had suggested that it was protected to a lesser degree than that of the Jewish population. That was yet another false idea. The Arabs, who tended to live together in small villages peopled exclusively by Arabs, in fact and in general enjoyed greater security than the Jews who, for the most part, lived in the large towns and were particularly vulnerable. He added that additional police stations had been opened in Arab neighbourhoods during the previous two years.

76. Mr. BANTON (Country Rapporteur) recalled that, when the Secretary-General had invited Governments to present their observations on the report of the independent expert, Mr. Alston, on enhancing the effectiveness of the human rights treaty system (E/CN.4/1997/74), Israel had, in its reply, recommended that all treaty bodies should adopt the practice, introduced by some of them, of providing States parties with the questions prompted by their reports well before the actual report was considered. Those members of the Committee who had questioned the wisdom of that practice would have been convinced that they were right during Mr. Sabel's presentation of the report of Israel the previous day. The Committee had often had occasion to confirm the maxim of Roman law that nobody could be a judge of his own actions; delegations often arrived persuaded that their Government was in the right and were reluctant to admit that those who expressed a different opinion were not necessarily partial.

77. When, at the end of their meeting the previous week, the Chairmen of treaty bodies had presented their conclusions to the representatives of some 70 delegations, they had realized that the report preparation system created a number of problems for State parties and that one of the ways of facilitating their task would be to formulate conclusions based on the consideration of their reports in a more precise manner so that they would be useful in the preparation of subsequent reports. In Israel's case, the Committee might, after having taken the time necessary to determine to what extent the replies to its questions were satisfactory, decide to indicate in its conclusions the type of dialogue it would like to establish, to request Israel to combine its tenth and eleventh reports in a single document, to draw the attention of the State party to the need to take into account the Committee's guidelines for the preparation of reports and its recommendations, to encourage it to develop its policy for the integration of Arab populations and to assure them of equality of treatment in respect of each of the rights proclaimed in the Convention, and to request it for facts and figures about public expenditure and the services it provided in order to be able to evaluate to what extent they were proportionate to the size of the ethnic groups who were the beneficiaries. It would probably also try to identify various reasons for inequality of treatment and determine their acceptability and nature, such as

public security, ethnic origin or religious beliefs, and agree on a statement concerning the occupied territories, whose inhabitants had rights that must be protected in accordance with international human rights instruments.

78. The CHAIRMAN assured the Israeli delegation that the Committee had listened to it with interest and respect, although it had not always been convinced. He expressed the hope that better understanding would prevail between the Committee and the delegation during the consideration of the next report, which should fill any gaps in the information provided so far.

79. Showing the same frankness as had been displayed by the Israeli representative who, the previous day, had described certain statements as political diatribe, he said that the Israeli representative had been unduly aggressive and unfair in stating that the Committee treated his country in a different way from other States parties. However, the atmosphere had since become calmer and that was an encouraging sign for the future.

80. He declared that the Committee had thus completed its consideration of the ninth periodic report of Israel.

81. The Israeli delegation withdrew.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.